

INDIAN NOTES AND MONOGRAPHS

EDITED BY F. W. HODGE

VOL X



No. 7

A SERIES OF PUBLICA-
TIONS RELATING TO THE
AMERICAN ABORIGINES

A WOODEN IMAGE FROM KENTUCKY

BY

GEORGE H. PEPPER



NEW YORK

MUSEUM OF THE AMERICAN INDIAN
HEYE FOUNDATION

1921

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THIS series of INDIAN NOTES AND MONOGRAPHS is devoted primarily to the publication of the results of studies by members of the staff of the Museum of the American Indian, Heye Foundation, and is uniform with HISPANIC NOTES AND MONOGRAPHS, published by the Hispanic Society of America, with which organization this Museum is in cordial coöperation.

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FRONT VIEW OF THE KENTUCKY IMAGE

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PREHISTORIC wooden images of human form from the eastern and central parts of the United States are practically unknown in the collections of American museums. Salts cave and Mammoth cave in Kentucky, wherein so many perishable objects of Indian manufacture have been found, have yielded no examples of an art that must have been widespread and highly developed before the discovery of America.

The Key Marco culture of the Gulf coast of Florida has furnished a number of carved wooden figures, but no general deductions can be drawn from the scattered objects that have survived and which give us but a faint idea of what

this particular phase of Indian art must have been when at its zenith.

The late Col. Bennett H. Young, of Louisville, was fortunate in obtaining a wooden image of human form that had been found in his own state. In his *Prehistoric Men of Kentucky*¹ he states:

"It is the only prehistoric image in Kentucky of wood that has been thoroughly preserved, and the manner of its making gives evidence that it had been executed by artists who antedated the historic period. Its form resembles the stone images, as it is in a sitting posture with a flat base and was built so it would stand alone, and the pose of the arms is very much like that found in the images."

In 1874, Lewis Collins, in his *History of Kentucky*,² published what is probably the first description of this image. He says:

"In the winter of 1869, L. Farmer, of Pineville, was hunting a fox (that had caught his turkey) among the cliffs that surround Pineville, and found a wooden image of a man, about two feet high, in a sitting posture, with no legs. It looked as though it might have been made by the Indians centuries ago. It is a good imitation of a man, and is made of yellow

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<p>pine. Some of the features, part of its nose and ears, are obliterated by time, although found in a place where it was kept entirely dry. One ear is visible, with a hole pierced in it as though once ornamented with jewelry. It is a great curiosity to travellers. The oldest inhabitants can tell nothing about it."</p> <p>This specimen is now the property of the Museum of the American Indian, Heye Foundation, and an idea of its form may be gained from the accompanying illustrations. Whether found in a cave or in a rock-shelter, the image must have been protected from the elements, as its form is well preserved, although the surface has deteriorated through weathering, and the features and other more delicate parts of the carving have suffered in consequence. From the primitive point of view, the treatment is masterful, but the sculptor failed to represent the lower part of the body, the hips and legs being depicted by an angular block which forms the supporting base. Owing to the fact that no similar figures in wood are available for comparison, it is impossible</p>	
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	<p>to state whether this particular treatment was commonly employed, but judging from the modeling of similar figures in pottery and stone, the carvings in wood no doubt reflected similar individual peculiarities and taste.</p> <p>Fortunate indeed is the student in the possession of this striking example of the early art of woodcarving among the aborigines of America, but it is unfortunate that the features have suffered to such an extent in the general surface decomposition. The eyes, nose, and mouth of the less destructible figures mentioned show such a range of featural variance that the inability to determine these features in the wooden image precludes the possibility of adequate comparison. The loss of the original surface has also obliterated all tool marks, making it impossible also to determine whether stone or metal implements were used in its production: thus one of the most tangible evidences of age has vanished.</p> <p>The figure is probably of yellow pine, as Collins states, and is 25½ inches in</p>
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PROFILE VIEW OF THE KENTUCKY IMAGE

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<p>height. The base is angular, and on the front and the sides is uncarved; it is 9 inches broad at the front, and is rounded to the back portion, which is $6\frac{1}{2}$ inches wide; the height of the base in front is $4\frac{1}{4}$ inches, and $3\frac{1}{2}$ inches in the rear. The trunk is squared, and at the base is $4\frac{1}{4}$ inches broad and $3\frac{1}{4}$ inches thick. The mammæ are not represented, but the chest is rounded and is made prominent by a flattening of the abdominal region that begins $7\frac{1}{2}$ inches from the upper part of the base. The neck is practically cylindrical and is 3 inches in diameter, the space from the shoulder to the lower part of the ear being $3\frac{1}{8}$ inches. The head is dolicocephalic in form, and the face is not flattened, as is the case with certain stone figures of the same general type. There remains but a suggestion of the eyes, nose, and mouth, not enough to determine what the features had been. Portions of the ears remain, that of the right one showing the general form and size. This evidently is the one that</p>	
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	<p>was complete and perforated when the figure was found, as mentioned in Collins' account, above quoted. The back of the trunk has a very pronounced ridge extending from a point a few inches below the neck to the base piece, this of course being an accentuation of the vertebral column. At the bottom of the back part of the base-block the surface has been roughly carved and was probably intended for the median line and rounded portions of the buttocks. The arms are carved in relief and are well formed; the shoulders are gracefully rounded, and the bend of the elbow, as well as the proportionate size of the upper and lower parts of the arms, were given thoughtful consideration by the carver. The hands, with extended fingers, rest upon the sides of the base, which approximates the thighs. The fingers are carved in high relief and the right hand is well preserved.</p> <p>Although there remain but few pre-historic wooden images, either large or small, the early narratives contain de-</p>
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<p>scriptions that prove their existence and use. From these accounts it would seem that they were employed in many ways by the natives of the eastern and southern parts of the United States.</p> <p>One of the earliest references to images or idols of wood is that given in 1590 in Hariot's <i>Narrative</i>.³ In the description of "Ther Idol Kiwasa," which was kept in the sacred house of the village of Secotan on Pamlico river, North Carolina, it states that—</p> <p>"The people of this cuntrie haue an Idol, which they call KIWASA: yt is carued of woode in lengthe 4. foote whose heade is like the heades of the people of Florida, the face is of a flesh colour, the brest white, the rest is all blacke, the thighes are also spottet with whitte. He hath a chayne abowt his necke of white beades, betweene which are other Rownde beades of copper which they esteeme more then golde or siuer. This Idol is placed in the temple of the towne of Secotam, as the keper of the kings dead corpses. Somtyme they haue two of thes idoles in theyr churches, and sometime 3, but neuer aboue, which they place in a darke corner wher they shew terrible."</p> <p>In Hariot's plate XVIII, under the</p>	
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	<p>caption "Their dances which they use att their hyghe feastes," there are represented seven posts, which are higher than the dancers. Each has a human head carved at the upper end, from which the post tapers to the point where it enters the ground. They are placed equidistant and form a circle, the faces directed toward the center.</p> <p>In 1624, Captain John Smith⁴ spoke of the images of the Virginia Indians as follows:</p> <p>"They thinke that all the gods are of humane shape, and therefore represent them by Images in the formes of men; which they call KEWA-SOWOK; one alone is called KEWASA; them they place in their Temples, where they worship, pray, sing, and make many offerings. The common sort thinke them also gods."</p> <p>Some of the early writers assert that the images had nothing to do with religious observances, but were statues of great men or heroes. Adair, writing of the upper Creeks in 1775,⁵ says:</p> <p>"I never heard that our North American Indians had images of any kind. There is a carved human statue of wood, to which, however,</p>
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<p>they pay no religious homage. It belongs to the head war-town of the Upper Muskohge country, and seems to have been originally designed to perpetuate the memory of some distinguished hero, who deserved well of his country; for, when their <i>Cusseena</i>, or bitter black, drink is about to be drank in the synedrion, they frequently, on common occasions, will bring it there, and honour it with the first conch-shell-full, by the hand of the chief religious attendant; and then they return it to its former place. It is observable, that the same beloved waiter, or holy attendant, and his co-adjutant, equally observe the same ceremony to every person of reputed merit, in that quadrangular place. When I past that way, circumstances did not allow me to view this singular figure; but I am assured by several of the traders, who have frequently seen it, that the carving is modest, and very neatly finished, not unworthy of a modern civilized artist."</p> <p>Charles C. Jones⁶ writes:</p> <p>"Elsewhere in the Spanish narratives do we read of wooden images of birds; but, so far as we now remember, no account is given of a single idol or object of adoration among the aborigines. At TALOMECO [a former Creek town near Savannah river, South Carolina], De Soto found a large temple or mausoleum, at whose entrance</p>	
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	<p>were gigantic statues of wood, carved with considerable skill, the largest of which was twelve feet high. They were armed with various weapons and 'stood in threatening attitudes, with ferocious looks.' The interior of the temple was decorated with statues of various shapes and sizes. There was also a great profusion of conchs and different kinds of sea and river shells. It does not appear, however, that these images were objects of religious veneration or positive worship. Like the 'carved human statue of wood' in the head war-town of the upper Muskohge country, described by Adair, they seem rather to have been effigies of heroes, the embodiments of brave memories, the symbols of tribal pomp and power."</p> <p>The same writer⁷ also says:</p> <p>"Of all the Southern tribes, however, the Natchez were probably most addicted to the worship of idols. Père le Petit (<i>Letters Ed. et Cur.</i>, IV, 261, quoted by Dr. Brinton, in the <i>Historical Magazine</i>, vol. IX, p. 300) says: 'The Natchez have a temple filled with idols. These idols are different figures of men and women for which they have the deepest veneration.' In another passage he is more explicit: 'Their idols are images of men and women made of stone and baked clay, heads and tails of extraordinary serpents, stuffed owls, pieces of crystal and the jaw-bones of great fishes.'"</p>
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It is therefore evident that the Indians comprising the ancient Southern tribes used the idols of stone and pottery in their temples, and, no doubt, in connection with similar idols carved from wood. Dr Joseph Jones,⁸ in his general conclusions concerning the antiquities of Tennessee, states:

"It is impossible to establish, by authentic history, the relations of the stone-grave race of Tennessee with the Natchez, and we do not assert that they were one and the same people, but only that they were most probably closely related in their origin, and may, at some former time, have been subjected to the same form of government, and practised the same or similar rites."

To what extent and in what numbers wooden idols in human form were used by the prehistoric Indians can never be ascertained, but from the great number of similar figures in stone and pottery that, through their ability to withstand the elements, have been preserved, it is highly probable that a great many were employed by the natives, both in their sacred houses and in their general ceremonies. As early as 1807

two such stone idols were described as having been presented to Mr Jefferson. In writing of these idols, C. C. Jones⁹ says:

"But is is not alone in Georgia that these images are found. Tennessee, above all her sister states, seems to be most prolific of them. In the beginning of this century, Mr. Jefferson was presented with two 'Indian busts' which were unearthed by some laborers who were excavating along the bank of the Cumberland River, near Palmyra (*Monthly Magazine, or British Register*, vol. XXIV, part I, for 1807, p. 74). They are described thus: 'The human form extends to the middle of the body, and the figures are nearly of the natural size. The lineaments are strongly marked, and such as are peculiar to the copper-colored aboriginal inhabitants of America. It is not known of what materials they are made: some are of opinion that they have been cut with a chisel or sharp instrument out of stone: others think that they have been moulded or shaped of a soft composition, and afterward baked. The substance is extremely hard. It has not been ascertained whether they are idols or only images of distinguished men. It will be an interesting object of research for antiquarians to discover who were the ancestors of the present Indians capable of executing such a good resemblance of the human head, face, neck, and shoulders.'"

Most of the pottery idols are relatively small, but some of those made of stone exceed two feet in height, and many of these closely approximate the form of the wooden idol from Kentucky.

Gen. Gates P. Thruston¹⁰ describes and illustrates three stone idols in the collection of the Tennessee Historical Society. One of these, from Trousdale county, in general appearance is similar to the wooden figure under consideration, the base being squared and the arms resting at the sides. One arm is missing, but the central portion of the remaining one is carved in the round. Most of the stone idols of this type have an oval face, but the second or central one of the group referred to by Thruston has an elongate face, with a pronounced pointed chin. This one is from Williamson county, the third idol is from Smith county, Tennessee. The arms are extended at the sides, with the forearms thrown forward and the hands flattened upon the knees, palms down, with fingers extended. The chest portion is raised,

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	<p>the abdominal region being thereby depressed, but having a rounded central area. These images are all from "the general section occupied by the Stone Grave race in middle Tennessee."</p> <p>In 1886 a stone idol was found near the Etowah group of mounds at Cartersville, Georgia. It is twenty-one inches in height and represents a seated human figure with crossed legs. The body is squared and is not unlike that of our wooden image from Kentucky. The treatment of the arms is the same, the shoulders being rounded and the elbows bent; the hands rest upon the knees, and the fingers are extended. The ears are carved in relief, and, judging by the remaining portion of the right ear of the wooden figure, are of the same form. The face is more rounded, but in its entirety the idol shows that both figures might well have come from the same source.¹¹</p> <p>Another stone idol, from the same place, was figured and described by C. C. Jones in 1873.¹² It is 15¾ inches</p>
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<p>in height, and represents the figure of a seated woman with a garment covering the hips and legs. The trunk is squared, and the breasts are in high relief and well carved. One arm is missing, but the other is separated from the body by a broad space, and the closed hand rests against the hip. The ears are well defined and are pierced for the attachment of ornaments. This figure is much more realistic than any other that had been noted, as the clavicles, breasts, and navel are indicated and the kilt-like dress is ornamented both on the sides and the back; it is, however, not so well proportioned as the one found in 1886.</p> <p>In the final analysis of his investigations as to the use of human images by the early tribes of Georgia and the adjacent country, Jones thus summarizes his conclusions:¹³</p> <p>“Without further pursuing this inquiry into the recorded observations of the early writers who have endeavored to inform us with regard to the religion of the Southern Indians, it will be perceived that, while we have thus</p>	
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far failed to note any emphatic account declaring the existence of idol-worship among the Georgia tribes, we are certified of the fact that idols were seen in the possession of coterminous nations, and that they were held in superstitious veneration and regard, in some measure at least, as objects of devotion. It does appear, however, that they occupied, in the esteem of the natives, a position far inferior to that conceded to the sun or to the Great Spirit, and that they constituted only a sort of religious machinery in the hands of kings, priests, conjurers, and old men, with which to dignify temples, supplement certain sacred festivals, and operate upon the fears and credulity of the more ignorant and unthinking masses. One is tempted to regard them rather as conjurers' images, as the private property of priests, as the likenesses of famous dead, and as the potent charms of medicine-men, than as the generally acknowledged embodiments of the person and presence of unseen yet recognized divinities. Although Bolzius, Bartram, Adair, and others, deny either positively or inferentially the existence of idols or images within the limits then occupied by the Georgia Indians, subsequent investigations prove by the discovered presence of images themselves, that at some time or other idol-worship of some sort was here practiced. The ornamented posts, the wooden images, and the questionable figures of men, birds, and animals sketched upon the white walls of the Creek

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<p>houses—if any religious significance they possessed—have long since perished.”</p> <p>Many other authorities might be quoted and mention made of the employment of similar objects by modern tribes, such as the use of carved human faces, by the Delaware Indians on the posts of their long-houses; the use of medicine dolls in sacred bundles; and of small fetishes in human form, sometimes merely the representation of a head, which may well be a reflex of the more elaborate images of earlier times. Such figures are mentioned by Zeisberger,¹⁴ who says:</p> <p>“The only idol which the Indians have, and which may properly be called an idol, is their Wsinkhoalican, that is image. It is an image cut in wood, representing a human head, in miniature, which they always carry about them either on a string around their neck or in a bag. They often bring offerings to it. In their houses of sacrifices they have a head of this idol as large as life put upon a pole in the middle of the room.”</p> <p>It is to be regretted that there are not more of these wooden images and that so little definite information concern-</p>	
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	<p>ing their use has been recorded; but the Kentucky specimen furnishes conclusive evidence that idols of wood, were carved in the same form as were those of stone and pottery.</p> <p>Investigations made by early writers seem to prove that images in human form and of all three kinds of materials referred to were used by the Indians in their places of worship, and all of these types have been found in Kentucky. Among the stone figures from that state, similar to those herein mentioned, three are figured by Colonel Young. The exact localities from which they came is not known, but they no doubt had their origin in the southern part of Kentucky, where practically all of the human images of pottery illustrated by Young were unearthed. Pineville, Kentucky, where the wooden figure was found, is in Bell county, on the southern border, and is only a few miles from the northern part of Claiborne county, Tennessee. It is therefore probable that the wooden image came from a locality not far from the</p>
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<p>northern boundary of the area noted for images of this form, though of other materials.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">NOTES</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. YOUNG, BENNETT H. The Prehistoric Men of Kentucky, <i>Filson Club Publications</i>, No. 25, p. 269, ill., p. 265, Louisville, 1910. 2. COLLINS, LEWIS. History of Kentucky, vol. 2, p. 412, Covington, Kentucky, 1874. 3. HARIOT, THOMAS. A Briefe and True Report of the New Found Land of Virginia, Frankfort, 1590; Quaritch reprint, London, 1893. 4. SMITH, CAPTAIN JOHN. The General Historie of Virginia, New England, and the Summer Isles, p. 10, London, 1624. 5. ADAIR, JAMES. The History of the American Indians, pp. 19-22, London, 1775. 6. JONES, CHARLES C., JR. Antiquities of the Southern Indians, p. 423, New York, 1873. 7. Ibid., p. 427. 8. JONES, DR JOSEPH. Explorations of the Aboriginal Remains of Tennessee, <i>Smithsonian Contributions to Knowledge</i> (Publication no. 259), p. 147, Washington, 1876. 9. JONES, CHARLES C., JR. Op. cit., p. 436. 10. THRUSTON, GATES P. The Antiquities of Tennessee and the Adjacent States, pp. 103-104, Cincinnati, 1897. 	
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	<p>11. MOOREHEAD, WARREN K. The Stone Age in North America, vol. 2, p. 28, Boston, 1910.</p> <p>12. JONES, CHARLES C., JR. Op. cit. pp. 432-435.</p> <p>13. Ibid., pp. 429-430.</p> <p>14. ZEISBERGER, DAVID. History of the North American Indians, edited by Archer Butler Hulbert and William Nathaniel Schwarze, <i>Ohio State Archæological and Historical Society</i>, p. 141, 1910. For further information on the use of carved wooden images among the Delaware Indians, see Harrington, M. R., Religion and Ceremonies of the Lenape, <i>Indian Notes and Monographs</i> (in press).</p>
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